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**Byzantium: its internal history
and relations with the Muslim world**

Collected Studies

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VARIORUM REPRINTS
London 1971

ISBN 0 902089 16 1

Published in Great Britain by
VARIORUM REPRINTS
21a Pembridge Mews London W11 3EQ

Printed in Switzerland by
REDA SA
1225 Chêne-Bourg Geneva

VARIORUM REPRINT CS7

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BYZANTINE CIRCUS FACTIONS AND ISLAMIC FUTUWWA ORGANIZATIONS (NEANIAI, FITYĀN, AHDAṮ)

This short note is an attempt to ascertain whether some of the urban futuwwa organizations of medieval Syria and Iran have any connection with or are descended from Byzantine municipal institutions in the Near East. From the time that Henri Pirenne put forth his famous thesis that the Arab invasions interrupted the unity and continuity of late classical civilization in the Mediterranean areas, scholars have debated the issue of continuity and disruption.¹ Islamicists demonstrated that contrary to Pirenne's general theory the Arabs maintained a very great deal of that which they found, one historian going so far as to describe the Umayyad and Abbassid caliphates as Neo-Byzantine and Neo-Sassanid empires respectively.² A large part of scholarly discussion has, more recently, centered about the question of innovation and continuity in the Muslim cities. Concerning the towns of Syria and northern Mesopotamia (those cities which were, previous to the Arab conquest, within the Byzantine empire) the opinion now is that there was much of pre-Islamic origin in the Muslim cities of these regions. When the Arabs conquered these lands in the first half of the seventh century, many of the towns surrendered by treaty and thus survived. Inasmuch as the newcomers did little in founding new towns in Syria and northern Mesopotamia, the old Byzantine towns remained as the basis of urban society.³ In many instances the general physical shape of the city survived, the market places and the public baths continuing much as they had previously been.⁴ In the realm of

¹ D. Dennett, "Pirenne and Muhammad", *Speculum*, 23 (1948), 168, 174, 189–190.

² G. Wiet, "L'Empire néo-byzantin des Omeyyades et l'Empire néo-sassanide des Abbassides", *Journal of World History*, 1 (1953), 63–71.

³ E. Ashtor/Strauß, "L'Administration urbaine en Syrie médiévale", *Rivista degli studi orientali*, 31 (1956), 111.

⁴ On this see the interesting remarks of G. von Grunebaum, "Die islamische Stadt", *Saecculum*, 6 (1955), 141, 144, 146, relating philologically the Arabic qaiṣariyya (hall of the textile merchants in the Islamic bazar) with the Byzantine βασιλική. See also the article "Kaisariya", EI₁. On buildings known as βασιλική in the forum of Antioch, G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria* (Princeton 1961), p. 634. There was a basilike in the forum which had been previously called Kaisarion in the late fourth century, but it seems to have been an administrative building. For the architectural meaning of βασιλική Downey, op. cit., p. 406, 57, and "The Architectural Significance of the Use of the Words stoa and basilike in Classical Literature", Amer. Journ. Archaeol. 41, (1937), 194–211. It seems to mean both (1) "a covered colonnade such as would be

municipal institutions some students of the question detect the origin of the Muslim *ra'*is (sort of 'mayor') in the Byzantine offices of *hipparchos*, *nykteparchos*, *praetor*, and *archon*;⁵ the direct and immediate origin of the *muhtasib* (official in charge of the guilds, standard weights and measures, municipal order, etc.) in the *agoranomos*;⁶ and the predecessor of Muslim guilds in the Byzantine artisinal corporations.⁷

One of the problems which has called forth considerable attention in Islamicist circles is the entire history of the *futuwwa* and the *ahdāth*, *'ayyārūn*, and *fityān*. The *ahdāth* (literally 'young men') were groups of young men who in the period of the ninth-twelfth centuries (the Arab sources become satisfactory only for this period in regards to the *ahdāth*) played an important role in the cities of Syria and upper Mesopotamia as urban militiamen and as a type of police. Consisting of local inhabitants the *ahdāth*, during periods of governmental weakness, were successful in opposing the arbitrariness of the government, in defending the city from foreign attack, and in asserting themselves as political factors in the history of the times.⁸ The *'ayyārūn* (rascals, vagabonds) by the ninth-twelfth centuries were performing very much the same functions in the cities of Iran as did the *ahdāth* in Syria.⁹ Quite similar in the same period were the *fityān* (young men) who were closely and even synonymously associated with the *'ayyārūn*.¹⁰ The relations of these three, or possibly two (there seems to be no unanimous agreement as to whether the *'ayyārūn* and *fityān* are one and the same or are two distinct groups), associations are not at all clear. There is general agreement that the *fityān*- *'ayyārūn*

built along the side of a forum, and (2) a larger columnar structure such as would commonly be called a basilica". Von Grunebaum points out that the Arab word for the baths (also used in Turkish) *hammam*, is the equivalent of the Greek θερμά. On the continuity of the baths from Byzantine into Islamic and Ottoman times see P. Koukoules, *Bυζαντινῶν βίος καὶ πολιτισμός* (Athens 1951), IV, 429. Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig 1883), I, 186, refers to baths and bathing, "ἐξῆλθεν εἰς τὰ θερμὰ τῶν Πυθίων θερμίσαι".

⁵ Ashtar/Strauß, loc. cit., 117.

⁶ Von Grunebaum, loc. cit., 148. Ashtar/Strauß, loc. cit., 117. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, "Un magistrat: le mohtesib", *Journal des Savants* (1947), 36, 40. G. Marçais, "Considérations sur les villes musulmanes et notamment sur le rôle du Mohtasib", *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin*, VI₁ (1954), 260–261.

⁷ Von Grunebaum, loc. cit., 148. B. Lewis, "The Islamic Guilds", *The Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 8 (1937), 20–37.

⁸ C. Cahen, "Ahḍāth", EI₂. Also by the same author, "Mouvements et organisations populaires dans les villes de l'Asie Musulmane au moyen âge: milices et associations de *foutouwwa*", *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin*, VII (1955) (hereafter "Mouvements et organisations"), 279–282; "Zur Geschichte der städtischen Gesellschaft im islamischen Orient des Mittelalters", *Saeculum*, 9 (1958) (hereafter "Zur Geschichte"), 68. Ashtar/Strauß, loc. cit., 119–121.

⁹ F. Taeschner, "Āyyār", EI₂. Cahen, "Mouvements et organisations", 276; „Zur Geschichte", 70–72.

¹⁰ F. Taeschner, "Futuwwa, eine gemeinschaftsbildende Idee im mittelalterlichen Orient und ihre verschiedenen Erscheinungsformen", *Schweiz. Archiv f. Volkskunde*, LII (1956), 124–134.

and aḥdāṭh strongly resembled one another in terms of function and external appearance. They were local city groups of 'young men' who served as urban militia, as opposers of oppression by the central government, and as violent factors in disturbing the peace of the towns.

However it has been maintained by some that, whereas the functions of the two groups were similar, their origins were different. The '*ayyārūn-fityān*', they continue, were organizations which cultivated the ideals of the *futuwwa* whereas the aḥdāṭh probably did not pay allegiance to these ideals.¹¹ Yet other scholars have maintained that the aḥdāṭh did in fact adhere to the *futuwwa*.¹² The *futuwwa*, as a social phenomenon, appears in medieval Islam in the guise of an ideology centering about such virtues as bravery and generosity which associations of young men theoretically cultivated. It is from the Arabic designation for these young men (*fityān*) that the abstract noun (*futuwwa*) describing these virtues is derived. Taeschner has suggested that this moral concept existed amongst the Arabs in the period before their expansion. After their arrival in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Iran, the concept was possibly accepted by the previously existing male associations in these lands, but evidently these associations were much given to loose living and did not strictly adhere to these Arab virtues associated with young manhood.¹³ It has been suggested that the *fityān* and concepts of male associations as social organizations (as in contrast to the moral concepts) in the Islamic towns of Syria and Iran themselves probably go back to the municipal institutions or associations of the Byzantine and Sassanid period. Inasmuch as the aḥdāṭh were found primarily in formerly Byzantine lands, and the *fityān-'*ayyārūn in formerly Sassanid regions, it has been suggested that possibly these institutions are descended from Byzantine and Sassanid associations respectively.¹⁴

Before proceeding to a consideration of the possible relations of the circus factions and the Islamic aḥdāṭh, *fityān-'*ayyārūn, one ought to glance briefly at (1) the geographical extent of the Byzantine circus factions, urban rioting, and city militia, (2) the chronological spread and vitality of these phenomena.

¹¹ Cahen, "Aḥdāṭh", EI₂.

¹² Ashtor/Strauß, loc. cit., 121.

¹³ Taeschner, loc. cit., 124–135.

¹⁴ Taeschner, loc. cit., 130, 135. Cahen, "Zur Geschichte", 73–74, is doubtful of continuity between the Byzantine circus factions and the aḥdāṭh, for, he says, in the sixth century the Byzantine emperors forbade the activities of the circus factions in Asia and one doesn't know if the Persian capture of Antioch left anything of the factions. Further, according to the same author, the circus factions were divided into two parties and the aḥdāṭh were not. Therefore the aḥdāṭh are probably not the direct descendants of the Byzantine circus factions. In "Mouvements et organisations", Cahen leans a little more in the opposite direction in remarking that even though the factions were weakened by government control in the sixth century, there is something of the Byzantine circus factions in the aḥdāṭh and *fityān*. The supposed weakening of the circus factions is not factually correct, and the point will be discussed shortly.

Theophanes describes a series of faction outbreaks which, commencing in the second year of the reign of Justin the first, convulsed the empire.

"In this same year the Blue faction created tumults in all cities, raising disturbances and effecting stonings and many murders. And they attacked the authorities. The evil of the disorder began in Antioch and then spread to all the cities, prevailing for five years. With the sword they slaughtered the Greens whom they encountered and going up slew those hiding in their homes, the archons not daring to effect punishment of the murders. These things were done until the sixth year (of the reign) of Justin the pious."¹⁵

Procopius, in the preface to his description of the great Nika riots which almost overthrew Justinian in Constantinople in 532, remarks:

"In each city the population has been divided for a long time past into the Blue and the Green factions."¹⁶

The author of the *Miracula Sancti Demetrii* describes similar conditions in the reign of Phocas (602–610):

"You all know only too well what a cloud of dust the devil has stirred up under the successor of Maurice of blessed memory, for he has stifled love and sown mutual hatred throughout the whole east, in Cilicia and Asia and Palestine and all the regions round, even up to the gates of the imperial city itself: the demes, not satisfied with shedding the blood of their fellow demesmen in the streets, have found their way into each other's houses and mercilessly murdered those within, throwing down alive from the upper stories women and children, young and old, who were too weak to save themselves by flight; in barbarian fashion they have plundered their fellow citizens, their acquaintances and relatives, and have set fire to their houses . . ."¹⁷

These three texts, which indicate that the circus factions and their strife consumed all (at least in the east) the cities of the empire in the sixth and early seventh centuries, are supported by other references to specific events. Circus factions and riots are mentioned in Asia Minor, Egypt, the Islands, Jerusalem, Caesarea of Palestine, Apameia, Edessa, Antioch, Tarsus, and Seleuceia,¹⁸ and it is stated that the citizens of many of the

¹⁵ Theophanes, I, 166: "Τῷ δ' αὐτῷ ἔτει ἐδημοκράτησε τὸ Βένετον μέρος, ἐν πάσαις ταῖς πόλεσι ταραχὰς ἐγείροντες καὶ λιθασμούς καὶ φόνους πολλοὺς ἀπεργαζόμενοι. ἐπήρχοντο δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἀρχούσιν. ἀπὸ δὲ Ἀντιοχείας ἡρχθῇ τὸ κακὸν τῆς ἀταξίας, καὶ οὕτω διεδόθῃ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς πόλεσιν, καὶ ἐκράτησεν ἐπὶ χρόνους ε'· καὶ ἔσφαζον ἔφεσι τοὺς ἀπαντῶντας Πρασίνους καὶ τοὺς κατ' οἶκον χρυπτομένους ἀνιόντες ἐφόνευον, μὴ τολμώντων τῶν ἀρχόντων ἐκδίκησον τῶν φόνων ποιῆσαι. ταῦτα διεπράττοντο ἔως ἔτους ἑκτου Ιουστίνου τοῦ εὐσεβοῦς". Malalas, *Chronographia*, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonn, 1831), pp. 416–417, remarks that it began in Constantinople and then spread to the other cities.

¹⁶ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, ed. and tr. H. B. Dewing (London-Cambridge, 1954), I, 218 (I, 24, 2): "οἱ δῆμοι ἐν πόλει ἐκάστη ἐς τε Βενέτους ἐκ παλαιοῦ καὶ Πρασίνους διήρχοντο."

¹⁷ The text is from the *Miracula S. Demetrii*, AASS 8 Oct. IV, 132. The translation is that of G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick, 1957), p. 77, 3. Paul the Deacon, *Historia Romana*, *Fonti per la storia d'Italia*, ed. A. Crivellucci (Rome 1914), p. 255: "Huius (sc. Phocae) tempore Prasini et Veneti per Orientem et Aegiptum civile bellum faciunt ac sese mutua cede prosternunt."

¹⁸ A. Maricq, "La durée du régime des partis populaires à Constantinople", Acad. r. de Belgique. Bull. classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques, 35 (1949), 73. Y. Janssens, "Les Bleus et les Verts sous Maurice, Phocas, et Héraclius", *Byzantium* 11 (1936), 514, 515, 526–529, 531–532. F. Conybeare, "Antiochos Strategos' Account

eastern towns, such as Edessa, Jerusalem, Sergiopolis, Amida, and Antioch, defended their cities against Persian attacks.¹⁹

These texts are sufficient indication that the circus factions were important factors in the political and social life of most of the towns of the eastern provinces of the Byzantine empire throughout the sixth century and down to the fall of Phocas in 610.

It was formerly thought, however, that the political activities and urban violence of the circus factions fatally declined under Heraclius and that in the century which followed (down to the reign of Leo III) the factions disappeared as effective political forces. They fell victims of the thematic system. It is true that references in the chronicles to the activities of the Greens and Blues almost disappear in the early seventh century, a disappearance which was accordingly interpreted and explained by the supposed imperial suppression of the demes. However, Levčenko demonstrated that Leontius was proclaimed emperor at Constantinople in 695 by the Blues.²⁰ Then Maricq advanced the political activities of the demesmen to the early ninth century by showing that Apsimar was proclaimed emperor by the Greens in 698, and that in the reign of Michael Rhangabe (811–813) the emperor still feared the political power of the factions. As a result, Michael cut off the hands of the bronze statue of Tyche in Constantinople so that the factions of the city would be made powerless against the government.²¹

It is quite obvious that the circus factions continued to indulge their passions for civil strife as late as the ninth century, and certainly the Con-

of the Sack of Jerusalem in A. D. 614”, English Histor. Rev. 25 (1910), 503. Malalas, 412. Procopius, I, 359–361, 491, 329. Downey, op. cit., 504, passim. Factions are also mentioned in Ephesus, Pamphylia, Priene, Didyma, and elsewhere in Asia Minor, and at Oxyrhynchus, Aikelah, Manuf, ‘Misr’, and Alexandria of Egypt, and finally in many of the islands.

¹⁹ Procopius, I, 51, 53, 59, 433–435, 491, 501, 327 ff. Conybeare, loc. cit., 504–505.

²⁰ M. Levčenko, „Venety i prasiny v Vizantii v V–VII vv.” Viz. Vrem. 1 (1947), 182.

²¹ Maricq, loc. cit., 67, 70, where the texts are conveniently quoted:

„Αψιμαρος ἀνηγορεύθη ὑπὸ τῶν πρασίνων, στεφθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ Καλλινίκου π(ατ)ριάρχου. βασιλεύσας ἔτη ζ.”

“Η δὲ Τύχη τῆς πόλεως χαλκῇ μετὰ μοδίου ἰσταται ἐν τῇ ἀνατολικῇ ἀψίδι· ἦν ἔφησαν (ὑπὸ) Μιχαὴλ τοῦ Ραγγαβέ ιειροκοπηθῆναι αὐτὴν τὴν στήλην διὰ τὸ μὴ ισχύειν τὰ δημοτικὰ μέρη κατὰ τῶν ἀνακτόρων”.

Also, Theophanes, I, 367–368, seems to imply that Justinian II was cultivating the support of the Blues. “ὅ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἀπήτει Καλλίνικον τὸν πατριάρχην ποιῆσαι εὐχήν, ἵνα καταλύσῃ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τῆς ἀγίας Θεοτόκου τῶν μητροπολίτου τὴν οὖσαν πλησίον τοῦ παλατίου, θέλων ἐν τῷ τόπῳ στῆσαι φιάλην καὶ βάθρα κτίσαι τοῦ δήμου τῶν Βενέτων, ὅπως ἔκει δέχωνται τὸν βασιλέα. ὁ δὲ πατριάρχης ἔλεγεν ὅτι· ‘εὐχήν ἐπὶ συστάσει ἐκκλησίας ἔχομεν, ἐπὶ δὲ καταλύσει ἐκκλησίας οὐ παρελάβομεν.’ βιαζομένου δὲ αὐτὸν τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ πάντως ἀπαιτοῦντος τὴν εὐχήν, ἔφη ὁ πατριάρχης· ‘δόξα τῷ θεῷ τῷ ἀνεχομένῳ πάντοτε, νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰώνας τῶν αἰώνων. ἀμήν.’ καὶ τοῦτο ἀκούσαντες κατέλυσαν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ἐποίησαν τὴν φιάλην. καὶ ἐποίησαν τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τῶν μητροπολίτου εἰς τὸ Πετρίν.”

stantinopolitans continue to display their violent participation in politics as late as the eleventh century in the guilds and the twelfth century by riots against the Latins.²²

Antioch, as the largest Byzantine city in Syria, seems to have had the most highly developed and articulate circus organizations in the east. Disturbances between the Blues and Greens are recorded as early as 40 AD²³ and by the fifth-seventh centuries the circus factions are playing a very important role in the political life of this eastern metropolis. Major insurrections seem to have been those of 387, the later years of the reign of Zeno, 494/5, 507, 519–524, 529, the reign of Phocas, 610.²⁴ These outbreaks were often violent and destructive with the result that, much as in the Nika riots of Constantinople, large parts of the city were burned and otherwise destroyed, and officials were driven from the city. The government frequently resorted to a variety of measures in an effort to subdue the bellicosity of the factions. Such were the gift of 1,000 lbs. of gold which Justin I presented to the city of Antioch, and also the temporary cessation of the Antiochene Olympic Games, theatrical shows, and dances in 520. In 527 Justin I and Justinian I issued an edict forbidding factional strife and disorders in an effort to halt this strife consuming the cities of the empire.²⁵ But the fact that factional troubles recurred in Antioch two years later indicates the impotence of the edict. The clash of 529 was so violent that the emperor forbade permanently theatrical performances in Antioch. How ineffective imperial legislation was in the matter of the factions is again demonstrated by the fact that performances were once more taking place in 531.²⁶ The riots of the Blues and Greens were convulsing Antioch in an almost epidemic fashion by the late sixth and early seventh centuries. One must conclude that, contrary to what has often been said about the 'decrepitude' of the factions of Antioch and the other Levantine towns on the eve of the Arab invasions (as a result of state tutelage), these

²² S. Vryonis, "Byzantine Δημοκρατία and the Guilds in the Eleventh Century", Dumbarton Oaks Papers, 17 (1963), 289–314. Maricq, loc. cit., 74, gives a plausible explanation for the virtual disappearance of the factions from the chronicles of this later period. Inasmuch as one of the principal regions of factional strife was Syria, its loss to the Arabs meant that its events would no longer be chronicled by the Byzantine authors. Also, the principal source for much of the detail of urban violence amongst the demes ultimately goes back to the account of John of Antioch, whose narrative halts in 610. Thus those accounts which rely on John of Antioch have little to say for the circus factions after that date.

²³ Downey, op. cit., pp. 192–193, 228, 241. Athletic contests were temporarily discontinued in 175 and 196 probably from fear of revolts.

²⁴ For the details and sources, Downey, op. cit., pp. 426–433, 497–499, 504–507, 515–519, 530–531, 571–572. P. Petit, Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche au IV^e siècle après J. C. (Paris 1955), 219–245. G. Kourbatov, "Le terme δῆμος dans les œuvres de Libanius et la question des δῆμοι byzantins", in Proceedings of the 25th International Congress of Orientalists (Moscow 1960), vol. III, 1–11.

²⁵ Malalas, 422.

²⁶ Malalas, 448–449. Downey, op. cit., 526–531.

urban militia-sportive organizations were thriving in the most virulent manner.

Aside from the fact that these associations were in a vigorous state at the time of the Arab invasions and aside from the similar features characterizing both the Byzantine and Islamic urban associations, is there anything else which might support the proposition that the Islamic *fityān* and *aḥdātāh* have, in some way, Byzantine ancestry? It is with this specific question in mind that one must examine the text of Procopius dealing with the siege of Antioch by Chosroes I in 540. The sixth century historian relates the story of the siege in considerable detail and includes the following remarks:

"The Rhomaioi resisted with all their strength, not soldiers alone, but also many of the bravest young men (*νεανίαι*) of the populace."²⁷

In the course of the fighting the imperial troops fled the city, but the young men (*νεανίαι*) remained to meet the Persian soldiers who had broken into Antioch.

"However, many of the young men of the populace who had on former occasions been in the habit of fighting with one another in civil strife in the hippodromes, though they descended from the wall, in no way fled but remained where they were."²⁸

After the flight of the Byzantine army the young men remained the sole defenders of the city of Antioch against the Persian troops, whose attack they met in the middle of the city.

"There many of the young men of the Antiochenes fought with them and in the beginning seemed to be winning the battle. Some of them (the young men) were hoplites (heavily armed), but the majority were unarmed, throwing stones only. Repulsing the enemy, they struck up the paean and proclaimed the emperor Justinian victorious, as if they had won."²⁹

Procopius speaks of the 'young men' of Antioch on one more occasion. After capturing Antioch, Chosroes and his entourage made a tour of Daphne, the famous Antiochene suburb. The Persian monarch sacrificed

²⁷ Procopius, I, 326–327 (II, 8, 11): "οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι ἡμύνοντο δυνάμει πάσῃ, οὐ στρατιῶται μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ δήμου εὐτολμότατοι νεανίαι πολλοί." For the siege of Antioch and Chosroes' Syrian campaign, Downey, op. cit., pp. 533–546; "The Persian Campaign in Syria in A. D. 540", *Speculum*, 28 (1953), 340–348.

²⁸ Procopius, II, 8, 17: "τοῦ μὲν οὖν δήμου νεανίαι πολλοὶ δσοι τὰ πρότερα πρός γε ἀλλήλους στασιάζειν ἐν τοῖς ἵπποδρομίοις εἰώθεσαν, ἐπειδὴ ἀπὸ τοῦ περιβόλου κατέβασαν, οὐδαμῆ ἔφευγον, ἀλλ' αὐτοῦ ἔμενον."

²⁹ Procopius, II, 8, 28: "Ἐνταῦθα δὲ αὐτοῖς τῶν Ἀντιοχέων νεανίαι πολλοὶ ἐς χεῖρας ἐλθόντες τὰ πρῶτα καθυπέρτεροι ἔδοξαν τῇ ἔμμβολῃ εἰναι. ἡσαν δὲ αὐτῶν τινες μὲν ὅπλιται, οἱ δὲ πλεῖστοι γυμνοὶ καὶ λίθων βολαῖς χρώμενοι μόναις. ὡσάμενοι δὲ τοὺς πολεμίους ἐπαιάνιζόν τε καὶ Ἰουστινιανὸν βασιλέα καλλίνικον, ἀπε τε νευκηρότες, ἀνέκραγον." Procopius, II, 8, 35, preserves yet another interesting detail which has a bearing on the general theme of continuity in the elements of Byzantine and Islamic culture, namely the veiling of women. "τότε φασὶ γυναῖκας τῶν ἐν Ἀντιοχεῖσιν ἐπιφανῶν δύο γενέσθαι μὲν ἔξω τοῦ περιβόλου, αἰσθομένας δὲ ὡς ὑπὸ τοῖς πολεμίοις γενήσονται (πανταχός γὰρ ἦδη περιβόλες καθεωρῶντο) δρόμῳ μὲν παρὰ ποταμὸν Ὁρόντην ἐλθεῖν, φοβουμένας δὲ μή τι σφᾶς ἐς τὸ σῶμα ὑβρίσωσι. Πέρσαι, ταῖς τε καλύπτραις ἐγκαλυψαμένας τὰ πρόσωπα καὶ ἐς τὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ῥεῦμα ἐμπεσούσας ἀφανισθῆναι."

to the nymphs, admired the grove and the fountains, but before departing burned the sanctuary of the Archangel Michael and some other buildings. The reason for the burning of these buildings is of some interest.

"And after sacrificing to the nymphs he departed, doing no further damage than burning the sanctuary of the archangel Michael together with certain other buildings, for the following reason. A Persian gentleman of high repute in the army of the Persians and well known to Chosroes, the king, while riding on horseback came in company with some others to a precipitous place near the so-called Tretum, where is a temple of the archangel Michael, the work of Evaris. This man, seeing one of the young men of Antioch on foot and concealing himself there, separated from the others and pursued him. Now the young man was a butcher, Aeimachus by name. When he was about to be overtaken, he turned about unexpectedly and threw a stone at his pursuer which hit him on the forehead and penetrated to the membrane by the ear. And the rider fell immediately to the ground, whereupon the youth drew out his sword and slew him. Then at his leisure he stripped him of his weapons and all his gold and whatever else he had on his person, and leaping upon his horse rode on."³⁰

From this account of the events at Antioch in 540 it emerges that the *νεανίαι*, who put up a stout defence against the enemy, were a sort of urban militia of that time which existed in most Byzantine towns.³¹ The key passage is the one in which Procopius tells the reader who the *νεανίαι* are. "τοῦ μὲν οὖν δήμου νεανίαι πολλοὶ ὅσοι τὰ πρότερα πρός γε ἀλλήλους στασιάζειν ἐν τοῖς ἵπποδρομίοις εἰώθεσαν." The *νεανίαι* are nothing more nor less than the members of the Byzantine circus factions. It would appear that *νεανίαι* has here the sense of a terminus technicus, for in addition to its generic meaning, signifying young men or youths, it obviously has the specialized meaning of the members of the circus factions who indulged in rioting and who also functioned as urban militiamen. Procopius uses the word as a terminus technicus in this sense on two other occasions. During the reign of Justinian I the citizens of Cyzicus in northwest Asia Minor were so oppressed by their harsh bishop, Eusebius, that they denounced him to the emperor and called him to court. Since, however, Eusebius was so powerful that he was able to circumvent the Cyzicenes, „certain young men (*νεανίαι*) plotted and killed him in the agora of Cyzicus."³² That the populace of Cyzicus was divided into circus factions

³⁰ Procopius, I, 353 (II, 11, 6–10). The critical portion of the Greek text is the following: "οὗτος ἀνὴρ τῶν τινα' Ἀντιοχέων νεανίαν πεζόν τε καὶ μόνον χρυπτόμενον ἐνταῦθα ἔδωκε τῶν ἑτέρων χωρίς. ἦν δὲ χρεοπώλης ὁ νεανίας, Ἀειμαχος ὄνομα."

³¹ Janssens, loc. cit., passim. John of Nikiu, The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu, tr. R. H. Charles (Oxford 1916), p. 176, says that Heraclius mustered them en route to Constantinople. "And when he (Heraclius) touched at the islands and the various stations on the sea coast, many people, notably those of the Green Faction, went on board with him."

³² Procopius, I, 25, 38: "ξυμφρονήσαντες νεανίαι τινὲς ἐν τῇ Κυζίκου ἀγορᾷ κτείνουσιν." That these *νεανίαι* refer to the members of the circus faction of Cyzicus is made plain by Procopius, Anecdota, 17, 41, 44: "τέτταροι δὲ ἐνιαυτοῖς ὕστερον Πρασίνους εὐρέσθαι δύο τῶν ἐν Κυζίκῳ στασιωτῶν ἴσχυσσεν οὕτερ πέρ τῶν τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ ἐπαναστάντων ἐλέγοντο εἶναι." "τοῖν δὲ νεανίαιν τούτοιν χειρας τὰς δεξιὰς ἔτεμε." Malalas, 480, says that John the Cappadocian was involved in the plot, though Procopius seems to deny it.

emerges also from the chronicle of Malalas who describes their acts of violence during the reign of Justinian.

"And in the same month there broke out a battle of the demes in Cyzicus as a result of which many were killed from both factions."³³

Finally, Procopius deals with the *νεανίαι*-faction members in the *Anecdota* where he considers their activities amongst the major evils which Justinian and Theodora inflicted upon the empire.

"Now the populace from of old has been divided into two Factions, as was stated by me in the preceding narrative, and he (Justinian) now adopted one of them, namely the Veneti or 'Blues', of whom, as it happened, he had previously been an enthusiastic supporter, and thus succeeded in throwing everything into confusion and disorder; and thereby he brought the Roman State to its knees... So at this time, while he kept fanning the flames and manifestly stirring up the Blues, the whole Roman Empire was agitated from top to bottom, as if an earthquake or a deluge had fallen upon it, or as if each and every city had been captured by the enemy. For everything was thrown into confusion in every part and nothing thereafter remained fixed, but both the laws and the orderly form of the government were completely overturned by the confusion that ensured."³⁴

Inasmuch as Justinian favored the Blues "many other 'young men' (*νεανίαι*) flocked to this association."³⁵ The emperor's interest did not stop at the mere protection of the *νεανίαι* but,

"he bestowed a great deal of money on these young men (*νεανίαι*) and he kept many of them about him, and he saw fit to call some of them to the magistracies and to other positions of honor."³⁶

Procopius excoriates the 'young men' for their violence and innovations which, he claims, had turned the cities into centers of upheaval.

"Now at first practically all of them carried weapons openly at night, but in the daytime they concealed small two-edged swords along the thigh under their mantle, and they gathered in groups as soon as it became dark and would waylay men of the better classes both in the market-place at large and in the alleys, robbing their victims of their clothing and their girdles and gold brooches and whatever besides they might have in their hands."³⁷

The normal functioning of urban administrative and juridical institutions was seriously disrupted by the power and influence of the *νεανίαι*.

"No investigations, however, of the crimes which had been committed took place. But the calamity in all cases fell unexpectedly and no one would try to avenge the fallen. And in no law or contract was there left any effective power resting upon the security of the existing order, but everything was turned to a reign of increasing violence and confusion, and the Government resembled a tyranny, yet not a tyranny that had become established, but one rather that was changing every day and constantly

³³ Malalas, 491-492: "καὶ τῷ αὐτῷ μηνὶ συνήφθη δημοτικὴ μάχη ἐν Κυζίκῳ, ὥστε πολλοὺς πεσεῖν ἐξ ἀμφοτέρων τῶν μερῶν."

³⁴ Procopius, *Anecdota*, ed. and tr. H. B. Dewing (London-Cambridge, 1954), 77-79 (7, 1, 6-7).

³⁵ Procopius, *Anecdota*, 7, 23: "καὶ ἄλλοι δὲ νεανίαι πολλοὶ ἐς ταύτην δὴ τὴν ἐταιρίαν ξυνέρρεον . . ."

³⁶ Procopius, *Anecdota*, 7, 42: "χρήματά τε γάρ μεγάλα τοῖς νεανίαις τούτοις προίετο, καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν ἀμφ' αὐτὸν εἶχε, τινὰς δὲ αὐτῶν ἐς τέ τὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀξιώματα καλεῖν ἐδικαίου."

³⁷ Procopius, *Anecdota*, 81-83, Dewing's translation (4, 15).

beginning again. And the decisions of the magistrates seemed like those of terrified men whose minds were enslaved through fear of a single man; and those who sat in judgement, in rendering their decisions on the points in dispute, gave their verdicts, not as seemed to them just and lawful, but according as each of the disputants had hostile or friendly relations with the Factions. For should any judge have disregarded the instructions of these men, the penalty of death hung imminently over him.”³⁸

At the same time the actions of these young men seem to reflect a certain social orientation, if not program, which incidentally favored the poor at the expense of the rich.

“And many money-lenders were forced through sheer compulsion to restore to their debtors their contracts without having received back any part of their loan, and many persons not at all willingly set their slaves free. And they say that certain women were forced by their own slaves to many acts that were sore against their will. And already the sons of men of high station, having mingled with these young men (*νεανίαι*), were compelling their fathers to do much against their will and in particular to deliver over their money to them.”³⁹

Their rowdiness extended to the violation of married women and young boys,⁴⁰ and to competitive displays of physical strength in the dark alleys of the cities.

“For the wrongdoers had no need to conceal their crimes, for no dread of punishment lay upon them, nay, there even grew up a sort of zest for competitions among them, since they got up exhibitions of strength and manliness, in which they showed that with a single blow they could kill any unarmed man who fell in their way.”⁴¹

The young men of the circus factions had also introduced innovations in dress and coiffure, thus further distinguishing themselves.

“In the first place, the mode of dressing the hair was changed to a rather novel style by the Factions; for they did not cut it at all as the other Romans did. For they did not touch the moustache or the beard at all, but they wished to have the hair of these grow out very long, as the Persians do. But the hair of their heads they cut off in front back to the temples, leaving the part behind to hang down to a very great length in a senseless fashion, just as the Massagetae do. Indeed for this reason they used to call this the ‘Hunnic’ fashion.

In the second place, as to fashions in dress, they all insisted on being well clad in fine garments, clothing themselves in raiment too pretentious for their individual rank. For they were enabled to acquire such clothing from stolen funds. And the part of the tunic which covered the arms was gathered by them very closely about the wrist, while from there to each shoulder it billowed out to an incredible breadth. And as often as their arms were waved about, either as they shouted in the theatres and hippodromes, or

³⁸ Procopius, *Anecdota*, 87, Dewing’s translation (7, 30–32).

³⁹ Procopius, *Anecdota*, 87–88, Dewing’s translation (7, 33–35). I have altered Dewing’s translation slightly where it seemed called for. This passage recalls somewhat the activities of the ‘*ayyārūn*.

⁴⁰ Procopius, *Anecdota*, 7, 36–38: “πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ ἀκούσιοι παῖδες τοῖς στασιώταις ἐς χοίτην ἀνοσίαν οὐκ ἀγνοούντων ἡναγκάσθησαν τῶν πατέρων ἔλθειν. καὶ γυναιξὶ μέντοι ἀνδράσι ξυνοικούσαις ταύτὸν τοῦτο ξυνέβη παθεῖν. καὶ λέγεται γυνὴ μία κόσμου περιβεβλημένη πολὺν πλεῖν μὲν ξὺν τῷ ἀνδρὶ ἐπὶ τι προάστειον τῶν ἐν τῇ ἀντιπέρας ἡπείρῳ, ἐντυχόντων δὲ σφίσιν ἐν τῷ διάπλῳ τούτῳ τῶν στασιωτῶν καὶ τοῦ μὲν ἀνδρὸς αὐτὴν ξὺν ἀπειλῇ ἀφαιρουμένων ἐς δὲ ἄκατον τὴν οἰκείαν ἐμβιβασάντων, ἐσελθεῖν μὲν ἐς τὴν ἄκατον ξὺν τοῖς νεανίαις, ἐγκελευσαμένη τῷ ἀνδρὶ λάθρᾳ ἀλλὰ θαρσεῖν τε καὶ μηδὲν ἐπ’ αὐτῇ δεδιέναι φαῦλον.”

⁴¹ Procopius, *Anecdota*, 85, Dewing’s translation (7, 28).

urged men on to victory in the customary manner, this part of their garments would actually soar aloft, causing the foolish to suppose that their bodies must be so fine and sturdy that they must needs be covered by such garments, not taking into consideration the fact that by the loosely woven and empty garment the meagreness much rather than the sturdiness of their bodies was demonstrated. Also their cloaks and their trousers and especially their shoes, as regards both name and fashion, were classed as Hunnic.”⁴²

Following this brief consideration of the circus factions in Byzantium, and especially in Antioch, it is necessary to compare them with the Islamic *fityān* and *aḥdāth*. There is an indubitably clear similarity of function in the Byzantine and Islamic associations. In each case they were local urban groups which served as urban militia in defending their cities from foreign enemies, rioting and protesting against demands of their own central governments. They both were involved in sectarian religious struggles within Christianity and Islam respectively. Amongst both the Byzantine and Islamic associations were to be found elements of sportive associations and elements recruited from the artisinal classes.⁴³

But that which is most striking is the fact that the members of the Byzantine associations, in Antioch and elsewhere, are called *veavīat*, young men. This is the meaning also of *fityān*, *aḥdāth*, in Arabic. Given the similarity of function and name, the probability or possibility that the circus factions of the Syrian towns are the parent institutions of some of the Islamic *futuwwa* institutions, the *fityān* and *aḥdāth*, is greatly increased.⁴⁴

⁴² Procopius, *Anecdota*, 79–81, Dewing’s translation (7, 8–14). I have changed the translation at one point. Dewing has translated ἀναξυρίδες as ‘drawers’, and I have changed this to ‘trousers’. The word ἀναξυρίδες was employed at least from the time of Herodotus to denote the trousers worn by eastern nations (Scythians etc.), see Lidell and Scott. The mention of the trousers is of particular interest inasmuch as the trousers were an important external aspect of Islamic *futuwwa* groups.

⁴³ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, II, 11, 6–10, Aeimachus was a butcher. The leader of the insurrection of the Greens in Antioch in the reign of Zeno was Olympius, an attendant in one of the baths, Downey, op. cit., pp. 498–499. A wood merchant and member of the Greens was killed by the Constantinopolitan faction of the Blues in 532, Theophanes, I, 183. One source equates the guilds in Egypt with the Greens, John of Nikiu, p. 175: “And taking advantage of the war between Bonosus and Nicetas, the artisan guilds (‘the Greens’) of Egypt arose (and) perpetrated outrage on ‘the Blues’, and gave themselves shamelessly to pillage and murder. And when Nicetas was apprised of these facts he had them arrested, and reproved them, and said unto them: ‘Do no outrage henceforth to any one.’ And he established peace amongst them. And he named prefects in all the cities and repressed plundering and violence, and he lightened their taxes for three years.” On p. 172 John of Nikiu refers to these supporters of his in the towns as the Green Faction. In Rhodes of the early seventh century the ἀρμενοράφοι were associated with the Greens, Bonwetsch, *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, Abhandlungen d. K. Ges. d. Wiss. z. Göttingen, Phil.-hist. Klasse, N.F., 12, 3 (1901), p. 89. I have had to quote this work from Janssens, loc. cit. 529, inasmuch as it was not available to me. See also G. Manojlović, “Le peuple de Constantinople”, *Byzantion*, 11 (1936), 647.

⁴⁴ This pejorative overtone associated with the ‘ayyārūn is frequently met with in the Byzantine sources when they refer to the factions, *Antiochos Strategos*, p. 503: “But in these days there arrived certain wicked men, who settled in Jerusalem. Some

Before abandoning Procopius, two more passages should finally be noted a propos of the present subject, for they have to do with a concrete example of the importation of the Byzantine circus factions into Sassanid territory during the sixth century. When Chosroes took away the inhabitants of Antioch into captivity he re-settled them in a region near Ctesiphon and built a new city for them.

"Now Chosroes built a city in Assyria in a place one day's journey distant from the city of Ctesiphon, and he named it the Antioch-of-Chosroes and settled there all the captives from Antioch, constructing for them a bath and a hippodrome and providing that they should have free enjoyment of their other luxuries besides. For he brought with him charioteers and musicians both from Antioch and from the other Roman cities. Besides this he always provisioned these citizens of Antioch at public expense more carefully than in the fashion of captives, and he required that they be called king's subjects, so as to be subordinate to no one of the magistrates, but to the king alone. And if any one else too who was a Roman in slavery ran away and succeeded in escaping to the Antioch-of-Chosroes, it was no longer possible for the owner of this captive to take him away, not even if he who had enslaved the man happened to be a person of especial note among the Persians."⁴⁵

Chosroes had simply founded a Byzantine municipality in his dominions and the implication is that the city had its circus factions. For the Persian sovereign constructed a bath and hippodrome and had brought both musicians and charioteers. Now faction life and organization centered about the hippodrome, bath, and agora. Mention has already been made of the bath attendant Olympius who was the ring leader of the Greens in Antioch in the late fifth century. One of the most important chiefs in the faction risings in Antioch and Constantinople during the late fifth and early sixth century was the famous charioteer Porphyrius Calliopas. A similarly important figure in the riots of 610 was the charioteer Calliopas Tribolaimes.⁴⁶ Not only was Chosroes aware of circus politics (he knew, for instance, that Justinian was a supporter of the Blues) but was himself a keen spectator of the races in the hippodrome on at least one occasion that it befell him to witness these races. During his Syrian invasion of

of them aforetime dwelled in this holy city with the devil's aid. They were named after the dress which they wore, and one faction was dubbed the Greens and the other the Blues. They were full of all villainy, and were not content with merely assaulting and plundering the faithful; but were banded together for bloodshed as well and for homicide. There was war and extermination ever among them, and they constantly committed evil deeds, even against the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

⁴⁵ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, I, 381, 383, Dewing's translation (II, 14, 1-4).

⁴⁶ Downey, op. cit., pp. 504-505. The participants in dramatic, musical, and dancing performances were also intimately associated with this turbulence. It was for this reason that they were banned some time around 522/3 in Antioch and again in 529, Downey, op. cit., pp. 519, 530. Malalas, pp. 416-417, 448-449. Janssens, loc. cit., 523-524. Persian monarchs frequently transplanted Byzantine subjects as colonists to their own domains. Thus following the Persian sack of Jerusalem in the early seventh century the Persians took away all persons who 'knew the art of building' and were 'skilled in architecture', *Antiochos Strategos*, pp. 507-508. On the prominence of the baths in all this, Petit, op. cit., 223.

540 he spared the city of Apameia upon payment of a heavy ransom, and then entered the city, ordered the performance of the games in the hippodrome, and watched them himself.

"Afterwards, being filled with a desire for popular applause, he commanded that the populace should go up into the hippodrome and that the charioteers should hold their accustomed contests. And he himself went up there also, eager to be a spectator of the performances. And since he had heard long before that the Emperor Justinian was extraordinarily fond of the Venetus colour, which is blue, wishing to go against him there also, he was desirous of bringing about victory for the Green. So the charioteers, starting from the barriers, began the contest, and by some chance he who was clad in the blue happened to pass his rival and take the lead. And he was followed in the same tracks by the wearer of the green colour. And Chosroes, thinking that this had been done purposely, was angry, and he cried out with a threat that the Caesar had wrongfully surpassed the others, and he commanded that the horses which were running in front should be held up, in order that from then on they might contend in the rear; and when this had been done just as he commanded, then Chosroes and the green faction were accounted victorious."⁴⁷

This example of the transplanting of Byzantine populations and their municipal institutions, and Chosroes' knowledge of and interest in the circus factions and games of the hippodrome shows quite clearly that these institutions were quite familiar to some of Persian society on the eve of the Arab invasion. That the Arabs found these circus factions in existence when they took the Byzantine cities of Egypt and Syria is certain. There is an extremely interesting detail in the chronicle of John of Nikiu which confirms this fact for the period of the Arab conquest toward the end of the reign of Heraclius.

"And Menas, who was chief of the Green Faction, and Cosmas, the son of Samuel, the leader of the Blues, assieged the city of Misr and harassed the Romans during the days of the Moslem."⁴⁸

It is evident that not only had the political activity of the factions not declined, but in this specific instance certain of the factions had gone over to the Arabs at a critical moment.⁴⁹ Thus the circus factions and the

⁴⁷ Procopius, History of the Wars, I, 358–361 translation of Dewing (II, 11, 31–36).

⁴⁸ John of Nikiu, p. 187.

⁴⁹ The desertion of the demes to the Muslims in Egypt does not seem to have been universal, at least so much is implied in the account which John of Nikiu, p. 194, gives for the situation in Alexandria itself:

"And when the patriarch had concluded this negotiation, he returned to the city of Alexandria, and he reported to Theodore and the general Constantine (the conditions of peace), to the intent that they should report them to the emperor Heraclius and support them before him. And straightway all the troops and the people of Alexandria and the general Theodore came together to him and paid their homage to the patriarch Cyrus. And he acquainted them with all the conditions which he had made with the Moslem, and he persuaded them all to accept them. And while things were in this condition, the Moslem came to receive the tribute, though the inhabitants of Alexandria had not yet been informed (of the treaty). And the Alexandrians, on seeing them, made ready for battle. But the troops and the generals held fast to the resolution they had adopted, and said: 'We cannot engage in battle with the Moslem: rather let the counsel of the patriarch Cyrus be observed.' Then the population rose up against

νεανίαι, the probable ancestors of some of the Muslim futuwwa organizations, were very much in evidence just before and after the Islamic conquest of Syria and Egypt.

the patriarch and sought to stone him. But he said unto them: 'I have made this treaty in order to save you and your children.' And plunged in much weeping and grief he besought them. And thereupon the Alexandrians felt ashamed before him, and offered him a large sum of gold to hand over to the Ismaelites together with the tribute which had been imposed on them."

This difference of the attitude of the inhabitants of Alexandria and of 'Misr' (The regions which John of Nikiu calls Lower and Upper Egypt respectively), is no doubt due to the fact of animosity between the two areas, between Greek and Copt. This is what John of Nikiu says, p. 189: "And the inhabitants of Misr were at variance with those of Lower Egypt and their strife ran high, but after a short time they made peace." This happened after the factions helped the Muslims to take Misr. This also implies that the factional strife continued after a portion of Egypt was conquered.

The factions of Jerusalem, much as those of Alexandria, objected when the Patriarch Zachariah tried to negotiate a peace with the Persians prior to their sack of Jerusalem in the early seventh century. Zachariah strongly desired to conclude terms with the Persians lest Jerusalem be destroyed. "But when the leaders of the riotous factions became aware what the patriarch designed to do, they gathered together and, assailing him like wild beasts, said to him: 'We warn thee, who art leader of this people, thou art intent on no good thing, in so far as thou thinkest of making peace with the enemy . . .'" Antiochos Strategos, pp. 504-505.